# THE HIDDEN DOOR

**Another of the Gray Mask Stories.**

***By Wadsworth Camp.***

GARTH had spent an hour or so on an unimpressive case, and it was nearly midnight when he turned south from the frontier of Harlem.

From time to time a light snow fell. He walked for a long time, scarcely aware of the landmarks of the neighborhood, rehearsing thoughts which, these last few weeks, had grown familiar and unpalatable. Now, as always, they failed to guide him to any explanation of Nora's abrupt abandonment of her routine. His recent visits to the flat had thrown him into the hospitable hands of the inspector, who, however, had maintained an incomprehensible silence as to his daughter's whereabouts. Garth could read in this attitude no antagonism to his own ambitions. He was confident that the result of his campaign for Nora's heart depended wholly on the girl herself.

He realized it was growing late. Absent-mindedly he turned into a side street, intending to reach 3d avenue and climb the steps of the nearest elevated station.

It was the discreet murmuring of a motor that routed finally his preoccupation. A limousine of an extravagant type had halted close to the curb at the end of the block. It pointed a contrast which stirred the detective's curiosity. The buildings, with high stoops and sunken areaways, were of a depressing, tasteless similarity — doubtless cheap boarding houses or dreary converted apartments. He saw that, while the chauffeur retained his seat, the door was opened from the inside and a tall man, in a high hat and a fur coat, which exposed an evening shirt, stepped with nervous haste to the sidewalk.

Garth slackened his pace. He watched with increasing interest while the man crossed the pavement, and, instead of climbing the steps, stooped to place an object on the ground.

Garth, speculating on this unconventional performance, stepped casually into an areaway, as if, indeed, it was his destination. From this shelter he observed the outcome.

After glancing quickly around the man in evening clothes straightened, returned to the limousine and closed the door. The car rolled almost silently up the street.

When the car was nearly opposite him the man inside tapped on the pane. On a subdued note the chauffeur exclaimed again, then pulled the car to the curb and stopped it.

* * * *

ONCE more the well dressed man left the limousine and crossed the sidewalk. For the second time he bent and placed something carefully on the ground.

As the driver set his gears and let the clutch in, Garth reached through the areaway railing and fumbled about the sidewalk for the object. His fingers found it—round, flat, hard. It was a piece of money.

Garth slipped from the areaway. He held his find up to the nearest lamp. The piece of money was a five-dollar gold piece. He glanced along the street. The automobile had just swung from sight. He started quickly after it.

When he turned the corner he was not surprised to find the limousine halted again, to see the young man returning from a third excursion to the house line where, doubtless, he had with an extreme anxiety placed another piece of money.

Garth broke into a run, the chauffeur glanced over his shoulder and muttered quickly to the man, who sprang in. As soon as the door was closed the car started with a speed almost affirmative of flight.

Garth hastened to read the license number on its rear. As he wrote it in his pocketbook he watched the red of the tail light diminish and disappear. He walked over and picked up a 25-cent piece.

Almost certainly another coin lay close to Lexington avenue, where the car has first stopped. He wanted to learn the denomination of that coin.

As soon as he turned the corner he saw that he would be too late. Breathlessly, he slipped into an areaway and watched.

A singularly small figure of a man shuffled across Lexington avenue and, as if with an assured purpose, made for the corner stoop. The face was concealed by the turned-up collar of a diminutive overcoat and by a felt hat, drawn low over the eyes.

The man bent and picked up the coin. Afterward he continued toward Garth, not, however, in a straight line.

Garth placed the five-dollar gold piece just outside the railing. He took his pocket lamp from his coat and held it ready.

The man had evidently caught the pallid gleaming of the gold. Without increasing his pace he shuffled across and stooped, stretching out his hand. Garth reached through the railing, and, as the hand was about to close over the money, grasped it with all his strength.

He had been prepared for fright and for a struggle, but scarcely for the shrill, animal cry that greeted his surprise.

At last Garth managed to wrist the small wrist so that practically he controlled the fellow's movements. Then he pressed the button of his lamp. The light shone mercilessly upon an abhorrent face.

The skin was yellow and tight, like parchment, across the high cheek bones. The tiny eyes lay far back in rounded sockets. But it was on the head, from which the hat had fallen, that Garth's glance lingered with the most distaste. A queue was curled about it.

"How did you know you'd find this money on the sidewalk?" he asked.

"No talk-ee, eh? All right, little one. Then you'll have a nice free ride downtown—just as a suspicious character."

For a possibility had occurred to him from which he shrank. Still, since it existed, it dictated a clear enough duty. He stepped from the areaway.

"Hustle along, sonny."

The Chinaman was on the point of collapse. Garth practically carried him to the corner. He was relieved to turn his man over at headquarters. He saw him placed in an empty detention cell.

As soon as he he was up the next morning he telephoned the bureau of licenses and apparently ran his one clue into a dead wall. The limousine, he found, belonged to Thomas Black. Garth flushed uncomfortably. He began to suspect that he had been guilty of an indiscretion, for Black, some years ago, had married the sister of Rufus Manford, whose recent selection as head of the Society of Social Justice had set in motion a cumbersome amount of self-satisfied and unusually ill-designed activity against crime. Still Garth knew that Manford was working with the inspector now on some urgent cases about which little was said at headquarters. It was possible, then, that the trail of coins had been arranged by Manford in the society's office for a purpose which his interference might have destroyed.

* * * *

BUT the growing day diminished the importance of the whole adventure. That returned to it only when the telephone summoned him as he was about to leave his rooms.

The voice that answered was gruff, disapproving.

"It's Ed, at headquarters. Say, you've got me in bad. That pigtail of yours. Can't make out the chief. Might be a member of his own family."

"What are you driving at, Ed? What's the matter with the pigtail?"

"Dead—that's all. Must have done it right after you left. Choked himself to heaven with his bloomin' queue. Now if he'd had it cut off proper——"

For the first time Garth entered the inspector's office with the discomfort of a culprit. Yet he could not accuse himself justly of blundering.

When he opened the door he appreciated that there was more than that out of the way at headquarters this morning. A woman bent, ancient, poor, sat in a chair to the right of the inspector's desk. He could hazard no more concerning her, because of an intricately-patterned shawl which was draped over her head and nearly covered her face.

"Here's a pretty mess! Why did you bring him in at all?"

Garth threw up his hands.

"How could I tell? I only brought him in on appearance. I knew you were after the funny medicine crowd. He was up to some queer business last night, and I thought he looked the type."

"Yes," the inspector agreed, drily, "he certainly looked the type, so much so that I'd gamble that wizened brain of his held all I want to know. Maybe you'll be accommodating enough to tell me how you happened to pick him up."

"Don't fret," the inspector said, scornfully. "She won't give you away even if you have made an ass of yourself."

Garth reddened. Impulsively he turned on his heel. Later he would be ashamed, since he understood the inspector thoroughly. But for the moment he surrendered himself to pride. The sound of the chair shoved back by the inspector was not unexpected, nor did he fail to catch the note of apology, the appeal for terms in the gruff voice.

"Come back here. Where are you going?"

But it was another voice that swung him sharply.

"Jim! Don't lose your temper."

Garth strode to the woman. He snatched the intricately patterned shawl from her head. The face beneath was old, stained and wrinkled; but there was no disguising the dark, young eyes which smiled up at him.

"So that's why?" he gasped. "You've done it well, Nora. Now maybe I can know something about it."

"Understand," he said, "Nora doesn't tell me any too much how she's working, and she's been at this off and on for a long time. She had to see me today. That's why I'm on my ear about the Chinaman. He might have saved her a good deal. You see, she's working on that case."

"Dope!" Garth cried. "It isn't safe. I tell you she's fighting desperate people, inspector."

"Talk to Nora. I've told her all that. When this rotten business came up she would go into it on her own hook. I guess that's because she knows Manford and his high-brow, meddling society have got the district attorney behind them, and they've put it up to me hard. She thinks she's spotted the house. That's what she had to see me about. She wants a raid arranged for tonight, and she wants you there!"

"You must tell us," Nora said, "how you found the Chinaman. I've no doubt he was one of them."

Garth told his story of the man in the limousine, of the trailing oriental, of what he had learned at the bureau of licenses. Nora offered no interruption, but she smiled sympathetically at the inspector's rage.

"They put it up to me," he grumbled. "Then they want to put it over me. What happens every time I work with these silk-stockined, fur-coated societies that think they know more about vice than the police? And to think, Garth, you snitched him away from them, then let him croak!"

Nora prepared to leave. Garth followed her to the hallway. He urged her to let him share her plans, to give him a more pronounced part in the risks. She shook her head.

"It's best to let me work this alone until the last minute, Jim."

The day lingered interminably. Whatever Nora had told her father he guarded with an unqualified stubbornness. When Garth joined the inspector in an uptown precinct house at 10 o'clock that evening he found Manford, in evening clothes, leaning against the desk while he tested the inspector's temper with a smiling face and an insinuating conversation.

A number of detectives and some men in uniform were grouped about the two. The inspector's commands were brief. At last he announced the number of the house.

Garth, Manford, and the inspector led the way. Garth's misgivings were far more profound than if the chief risk had been his own. Where was Nora now? What would such conscienceless men do to her if they found at the last moment she was responsible for their hopeless predicament?

The house presented an uncommunicative front. They climbed the steps. No lights showed in the hall. The windows appeared to be shuttered. The inspector pulled the old-fashioned bell handle. After an undisturbed wait he tried again. Then he put his shoulder to the door.

"Give a hand here, boys. Bring that ax."

* * * *

THE lock snapped under their assault. They stumbled through into the vestibule. Garth choked. He was aware of fine particles of dust in his nose and his throat. They attacked the inner door. They burst through into a black hallway. The dust rose in clouds. The inspector snapped his flashlight and fell back with an exclamation, disappointed and surprised.

The light shone on bare floors and walls. Its power was radically diminished by the long accumulated dust their entrance had disturbed. As far as the first floor was concerned they stood in an empty house.

Manford sneered.

"Get upstairs," the inspector snarled to his men. "Scour every inch of this place."

He turned to Manford.

"I'll swear they were here this afternoon. This house was used as a dive no later than this afternoon."

The plain-clothes men returned almost at once. There was not a person in the house—not a piece of furniture. The grime on the walls, the thick dust testified to its long disuse.

Manford's superior wisdom appeared justified.

"Good night, inspector," he drawled. "I cut the opera to take in this example of police efficiency. I hope my society, on its own initiative, will be able to make more progress with the case. At least I can learn from the police what sins to omit."

The inspector, strangely, did not answer. Manford lighted a cigarette, grinning, and strolled down the steps.

Garth grasped the inspector's arm. He drew him to one side.

"How were you so sure?" he asked under his breath. "Because Nora gave you this number?"

"No. She had no number to give me. But this afternoon I saw her enter this house. I watched the door close behind her, and Garth—she has never come out."

Garth scarcely dared open his mind to full comprehension. If Nora had been directed to this deserted building and admitted, it was clear that her connection with the police had been discovered. It was logically certain that she had walked into an elaborately plotted ambush.

He hurried to the sidewalk where he found the inspector braced heavily against the rail.

"What can I do, Garth?" the big man asked, hoarsely.

"Chief," he whispered, "take your men back to the station house and keep them ready. I'll telephone you there in a few minutes, fifteen or twenty at the outside."

"What are you going to do, Garth?"

"Take one chance to get Nora back," he answered quickly, "probably say good-bye to New York. It was something I thought of last night. It seemed common sense to forget it this morning. Now, I'm going to make sure. No time to talk."

He ran swiftly west, past the house on the corner, where the man had left the first coin, past the areaway where he had secreted himself last night, into Park avenue, always on the course taken by the limousine. And, when he came to Black's number he saw lights burned in the upper story of the small but expensive house. He pressed the electric button, sighing his relief. He was grimly determined to see the thing through. So when the door was opened by a sleek serving-man, he did not hesitate.

Garth gave him a glimpse of his badge, pushed past, and entered the reception hall. The servant turned, staring at him with insolent eyes.

"You'll have to get out of here. What do you mean by forcing——"

"Mr. Black! Mr. Black!"

"Who is that? What's all this row, Arnold?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Black," Garth said hurriedly. "I have to speak to you about something too important to delay."

He paused, embarrassed, reluctant to go on, for in the brightly lighted doorway of the living room a woman had appeared, small, with an extraordinary grace of figure and a face which, in a trivial, light-hearted way, impressed him as rarely beautiful. She wore evening dress. A wrap was draped across her arm. Her resemblance to Manford established her identity beyond debate.

"It makes no difference, John. You weren't coming any way. I'll tell Aunt Sarah why—business!"

Garth breathed more freely. He waited until he was sure she was started for her reception or dance, unsuspecting the desolation he had brought into her home. Then he swung on Black.

"Come in here."

He indicated the living room.

Black followed with uncertain steps. The light shone on his sallow face out of which heavy eyes looked distrustfully.

"What do you want?" Black asked. "What does Manford want?"

"Don't trouble to sit down, Mr. Black," Garth directed. 'I've little time—just enough to tell you that I'm on to you.

Black, with an odd, halting motion, reached the center table. His fingers shaking, he lifted a cigarette from a silver box and essayed to strike a match. The wood splintered. He fumbled aimlessly about the table. He took the unlighted cigarette from his mouth. He stammered:

"Wh—what the devil do you mean?"

"No use bluffing," Garth said. "You give yourself away. But don't get too scared. I'm the only one who knows."

"Who are you?"

Garth threw back his coat lapel, displaying momentarily his badge.

Black's voice rose on a shrill note.

"It's a lie! It's a lie!"

"I watched you last night," he said, "planting money here and there—a pretty, generous fancy, just to give people the joy of finding it. Men don't do such things in their right senses. I've heard of it, but the fact that you were the brother-in-law of the head of an organization that was after these cases put me off the track. Thought you were working for him. Now that I've had a good look at you, there's no question."

Black made a last pitiful effort.

"This is blackmail," said Black.

"If have my price," Garth admitted. Black sat on the table edge.

"I'll put them on to you downtown—through Manford."

"You! You'd never have the nerve. Give a police surgeon one good look at you!"

Black fumbled in one of the drawers. He lifted out a check book.

"How much?" he asked, with dry lips.

"Not money," Garth said.

"When I saw you making a fool of yourself last night," he went on, "you had come straight from a house you are going to get me in tonight."

The check book fluttered to the floor.

"Wh—what is it?"

"To save a woman," Garth answered. "It's enough for you to know that they've trapped her there, and that she means too much to me——"

"You mean you love her. Then maybe you can understand. What about my wife?"

* * * *

"BLACK," Garth said, quietly, "you stand a better chance of sparing your wife if you meet my price. I promise to do all I can to keep you out of the scandal. I'll get you away clean if it can be done. All I ask is that, for your wife's sake, you'll try to be a man. But now listen. By god, if you refuse to do this thing, I'll shout the thing from the housetops. I'll take you to a cell within the next ten minutes. What about your wife then? Look at me. I'm not bluffing. I hate it, but I've no choice. It's life and death to me, and, since it's all I've got, I'm going to use your reputation to make it life."

"You do mean it. I can't do it. I tell you I can't do it."

Garth reached out and grasped the telephone. Black stumbled to his feet and tore at Garth's arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"Call for a patrol wagon to drive up to your exalted home."

"No, no, no!"

"Then you agree?"

"Then I agree."

The gleam in Black's eye was revealing. It retarded Garth's relief. It warned him that, entering the place alone, he could be handled, as, perhaps, Nora had been handled.

"I'll get my hat and coat," Black said.

"No," Garth answered. "From now on you'll stick to me like a brother."

He took the receiver from the telephone and got the inspector at the station house. While Black protested, he instructed the inspector to have a man follow Black and himself, and, no matter what house they entered, to surround that entire block and to keep a watch on every house front. If he could communicate in no other way, Garth promised to fire his revolver twice, if possible, from a front window.

Black led the way without further protest down the staircase. He crossed the avenue with a lurching gait. Garth glanced back. A dark figure skulked after them. So that was all right. The inspector would know their destination immediately.

Black walked straight for the block in which he had been at his folly last night. But he did not pause there. He continued across Lexington avenue and made confidently for the deserted, dust-filled house which just now had mocked the police.

Black took a key from his pocket, and with the ease of long habit inserted it through the obscurity in the lock of the basement door and Garth walked into the blackness with a quickening suspense.

The darkness was so complete that Garth had to keep his fingers on the other's arm to avoid stumbling against the walls. Yet his guide went with a quick assurance to the rear door, which he opened with another key. Black proceeded along the fence to the corner.

Black stooped. Garth looked down at a rustling among the rubbish. A thin piece of flagging had opened at his feet as if hinged like a trap-door, leaving visible the top of a flight of rough wooden steps.

Black stepped down and Garth followed. The steps led diagonally under the angle of the fence. Others rose into the corner of the adjacent yard. If this was their destination, it was neither to one side nor directly behind the empty house used as an entrance. Garth marveled at the simplicity of the contrivance.

While Black carefully lowered the flag on the other side Garth glanced around. They stood in the kitchen shed of a house which, of course, faced the next street.

Garth saw Black press an electric button. Almost at once the door opened a crack, but no gleam of light came through. Black muttered something unintelligible to Garth and led him into darkness. Yet in spite of it he was sure it was a woman who had admitted them.

"This way," Black said.

Garth followed, scarcely breathing. Where would he find Nora? How would he find her?

A door opened ahead, and at last there was a light—a subdued, brown light, unhealthy ,suggestive of a melancholy repose.

Garth turned sharply to inspect the woman who had followed him in. He drew back. He controlled his gasp of relief and gratitude, for it was Nora herself who had opened the door for them and who stood now on the threshold of the hall.

His astonishment had held him longer than was discreet. He turned at a sound to find his conductor gone. He knew what that portended. He cursed his carelessness.

Nora took his arm.

"What are you doing here?" she whispered tensely. "Go before it's too late. I knew they suspected trouble tonight, but I never dreamed of your getting in here alone. Go—the way you came."

"To be caught in the yard?" he scoffed. "That fellow's given me away by this time. They'll watch that exit first."

He ran along the hallway. At the foot of the stairs Nora caught his arm again.

"Where are you going?"

"Up there," he answered. "I haven't the ghost of a show in this suffocating basement. They'll look for me here first.

He climbed the stairs. She followed him.

"Jim," she breathed, "it's hopeless. They'll never let you out."

He turned at the head of the stairs. A repellant odor, not to be classified, crept into his nostrils, made him want to cough. Heavy prple hangings were draped across two doorways.

"Tell me the lay-out," he whispered. "Quick! The yard isn't the only get-away?"

"Except the roof and the front," she whispered back, "and they're locked. The head one keeps the keys. For God's sake, Jim, try to get out of this house before it's too late.'

He pointed to one of the draped doorways. It was at the end of the hall, but the hall appeared to him too short.

"Is that the front door?"

She shook her head.

"Only leads to the front of the house. That's planted, of course—a boarding-house. I tell you that door's locked."

"Then how can I get to a front window?"

"You can't, Jim."

He tried to plan.

"Then how am I——"

A heavy step seemed to set the thick, brown air in lazy motion. It came from a nearby room. It approached. Garth glanced at the purple hangings, expecting them to part on one who would discipline without mercy his presumption.

"Jim! They've got you, and if they see me with you——"

She spread her arms.

They know you're a detective. Your only hope is that they shouldn't suspect me, and I can't lose all I've done. Hit me, Jim, Jim!"

"Nora!"

"Trust me," she begged, "and we've a chance. They mustn't doubt me. Hit me, Jim. Take hold of me. Clap your hand over my mouth. Quick!"

He drew back. He knew she was right, but he couldn't, all at once, bring himself to obey.

* * * *

SUDDENLY Nora screamed. She flung upon him tigerishly.

"Jim!" she whispered. "Now!"

The contact swept him with a bitter, distorted content. He had to force himself to grasp her shoulders, and to bend them back. Her hand rose. Scarcely understanding her intention, he saw her strike herself sharply across the face. An ugly, reddish mark survived.

"You coward, Jim!"

The curtains were wider, but always, as he forced her back, he combated the desire to draw her closer instead, to heal with his lips the scar with which his precipitancy had marked her.

She cried out again. He glanced at the curtains. He let her go, staring with a sense of loathing at a yellow, wrinkled face, which protruded from the purple, and permitted him to see, glistening above it, a braid of hair, serpent-like and perilous.

The leering face was withdrawn. Garth heard a low whistle modulated on an unfamiliar, minor interval.

"Don't resist them, Jim," Nora whispered. "I'll do what I can."

Then she turned and ran, screaming, through the curtains.

Garth dashed for the hidden door which led to the front of the house. If only he could break through there, reach a window, and signal the inspector! But when he tore the curtains back he faced panels of an exceptional stoutness, unquestionably built to deaden sound as well as to form a competent barricade. He surrendered to the realization that he was caught in the heart of this evil house. He wondered if Nora's strategy retarded his captors.

A stealthy shuffling turned him from the door, so that he faced the hall. He had heard that same sound last night when the diminutive Chinaman had approached him. He saw three of the same mold, whose queues appeared to writhe in the brown and stifling light as they glided along the hall, their talonlike hands outstretched.

He guessed that the picture was intended to terrify, to impress upon him the futility of resistance, yet while he had his revolver the success of such an attack was remote.

"Stay where you are," he said puzzled, trying to understand. "Come any closer and I'll shoot."

The yellow mouths grinned. Then, when it was too late, Garth understood the trick. A rush of colder air on his back informed him that the heavy door was open. He stood between two fires. In fact, before he could turn, his wrists were grasped. Two leering faces were close to him, but as the revolver was wrenched from his hand, he pulled the trigger twice. With the great door open these explosions might penetrate beyond the house wall, might carry even to the inspector's men on the sidewalk.

They had, at least, aroused in the thick, brown twilight of the house a restless, incoherent stirring. Voices muttered. Steps pattered here and there. A muffled bell commenced to complain. Through the curtains from the inner room stepped a man—a white man with cruelly intelligent features. Garth realized that he probably faced the head of this organization which for so long had outwitted the police.

Garth laughed with an effort at bravado.

"That was a signal," he said. "Block's surrounded. They'll be in here before you light a joss stick. Call these things off, or you're as good as in the chair."

Upstairs the stirrings increased. Some one shrieked.

Nora appeared at the man's elbow. Her face was twisted with an abandoned terror.

"Men in the yard!" she gasped.

Garth guessed that it was a part of her scheme to turn the hunt from him, to give him that one moment needed. And it worked. He felt his hands released. The Chinamen crouched along the wall, as if trying to conceal themselves, whining pitifully.

WHEN IT WAS TOO LATE GARTH UNDERSTOOD THE TRICK.

Garth jumped through the front hall. The vestibule door was locked and the key was missing. There was no time to conquer locks. His opportunity was limited. So he ran into the front room. The window catch baffled him. He didn't dare wait to fumble with it. He raised his fists and crashed them through the glass. His hands, scratched and bleeding a little, waved a frantic appeal. He shouted. And he heard answering voices and the pounding of feet. He saw figures glide into view and spring up the steps. The battering of shoulders filled the house with a turmoil that drowned its own increasing agitation.

He went back to the inner hall.

"Nora!" he called.

He pushed through the curtains into a room fantastic with oriental furnishings. Black, in a panic, had Nora in his grasp. The girl struggled mutely.

"Drop her, Black!"

Black turned.

"That ends our bargain," Garth said harshly.

"She tried to stop me," Black quavered.

"He's the brother-in-law," Garth said scorafully, "of the very man who's been trying in his useless way to smash this gang. What do you think of that?"

* * * *

NORA came forward. She was shocked, but it was clear she failed to share his scorn. As the front door yielded she put her hand on his arm.

"Have you ever seen his wife, Jim?" she asked simply.

He nodded.

"So have I," she went on. "She's the one I'm thinking of. She's too young, too happy, to have her whole life stained by this thing."

But Garth's anger persisted. Black, however, in response to Nora's nod, slipped behind the window curtains. The inspector, Manford, and a number of detectives rushed in.

"Get your men through the house," Nora advised.

The inspector motioned the men to go. He lumbered over to Nora. He put his arms around her. An excessive gratitude moistened his eyes and thickened his voice.

"Thank the Lord!"

"Thank Jim," she said, "although he risked everything by appearing here."

"If you'd told us more of your plans," Garth said, "we would have worked better together."

"I didn't dare," she answered. "I knew so little myself. So much depended on success."

Manford's fragile fingers pulled at his mustache. The humor in his eyes did not quite veil a real admiration.

"Well!" he said, gayly. "Let me congratulate you, inspector. The police have put something worth while over—through a woman."

Garth, whose eagerness had carried him closer to the girl, noticed for the first time on her neck a bruise left by Black's urgent fingers. A sudden, unreasoning temper swept him with the necessity for atonement. Impulsively he burst out:

"Inspector, one of the beasts you want is behind those curtains."

Nora cried out:

"Jim! You might have let me have that. His wife!"

The inspector glanced from one to the other.

"What's on your mind, Nora?"

Manford laughed easily.

"No sentiment in this game, young woman. If we thought of the wives there'd be few arrests."

With an air of satisfaction, as if the climatic features of the raid had been reserved for his importance, he snatched the curtains open. Black cowered in the embrasure of the boarded window, glaring out at his brother-in-law. He moistened his lips.

"Don't let them tell Anna, Billy."

Manford's satisfaction, founded on a self-imposed superiority, suddenly expired. He became rather pitifully human. His cheeks darkened. His insinuating antagonism for the inspector dwindled and faltered, finally, into a passionate mendicancy. He would meet any terms to spare his sister's entanglement in the destroying scandal.

"I'm afraid you might think the police didn't do its duty," the inspector said, softly. "I just heard your own motto—no sentiment for the wives."

Garth had not shifted his glance from Nora. Her disapproval more and more impressed him, yet, with the bruise still eloquent on her white neck, he forced himself only with distaste to bargain.

"He's my prisoner, Manford. If the inspector says the word, we'll tamper with the law and get him away and home. There's one condition: He does as I say for the next couple of years—takes any treatment I suggest."

"Don't worry. I'll see to that," Manford said. "It's good of you, Garth."

He turned to his brother-in-law:

"Are you willing, John?"

Black stumbled from the embrasure. He reached out his hands appealingly.

"Yes, yes. I want to—with all my heart."

"Then, inspector——" Manford began.

The inspector winked good-humoredly.

"Since we're all such old friends I agree. I've never had a come-back yet from reading a little humanity and mercy into the law. You've a good deal to learn about police work, young man. Let's start your education now. We'll see what the boys have bagged."

When the crowded police van had left, Nora, Garth and the inspector stepped into the crisp air.

"Garth," the inspector said, "you and Nora ought to have medals or something. That paleface at the head of the gang is Jerry Smith. He must have been sent on from San Francisco. If there's a country-wide syndicate of crime he's on the board of directors along with your old friend, Slim."

"Some day," Garth said, "that syndicate will be tapped properly."

Nora, after her experience in the heavy, repellent atmosphere of the house, was anxious to remain in the air. She proposed that they walk downtown. Garth, aware of her displeasure, scarcely dared suggest an answer to his curiosity, but the inspector, in a happier mood, did not hesitate.

"Maybe, Nora, you'll tell us how you got in that dive as a first-class housemaid."

* * * *

THERE was only one way I could think of," she answered. "The place was bound to make cases for Bellevue, so I went to the head nurse and took her into my confidence. She kept me posted. At every chance I went there and was apparently ill myself of the same dreadful illness as the patient in the next cot. About two weeks ago the head nurse telephoned me a case had come in which looked promising. I've been there since. I'll confess, the best I hoped for was the number of the house, but this girl grew confidential finally. She had actually worked there. When she found she couldn't go back for a long time, and learned that I was about to be discharged as cured, she whispered a telephone number and a name. She said they would want somebody and it was hard to get just the right kind. I called up last night and told them about her and my anxiety for the place. A meeting was arranged with Smith in a cafe. He wouldn't give me the address, but he agreed to take me there this afternoon. You see he wouldn't have let me out again until he was sure of me—no afternoons off there."

"Clever, Nora," the inspector muttered.

She shook her head.

"Only choosing the best chance. I knew I couldn't trace them in any obvious fashion. They were too careful. Few customers had the run of the place. The stuff was taken to the rest. The way they had Black followed last night to make sure he left no trail shows how they accounted for everything. He had evidently been seen answering to that generous symptom of his before."

Garth noticed that she did not speak to him directly, but her resentment could not completely veil her relief at his safety, her appreciation of the courage that had urged him to her rescue, her gratitude that his daring had brought about the end she had so ardently desired. He hoped, moreover, that there was about her quiet manner something to be followed to that necessary but impulsive moment in the brown radiance of the evil house.

Yet that illusion she did not permit him to hold for long. He left the inspector and her at the flat, with an uncomfortable feeling of having failed to measure up to the idea of him she had developed. She did not mention Black again, but her restraint persisted. Sooner or later, he tried to tell himself, something would destroy that—probably another case that would throw them together, that would make them depend one upon the other.

(Copyright, 1921.)

# U. S. GOVERNMENT HAS FINGER PRINTS OF FIVE MILLION MEN FILED IN RECORDS

**ARMY Identification Bureau, Located in the Old Ford Theater Building, Aids Searches for Lost Persons by Locating Prints—Great Value of the System—Peculiar Cases on Record—No Chance of Two Prints Being the Same—How the Prints Are Indexed and Catalogued.**

"CHARACTER development" is frequently enumerated in the recruiting posters as among the numerous benefits to be derived from service in the Army of Uncle Sam, the inference being that after three years of contact with Army discipline no one could find it in his heart to enter upon a life of crime.

Without going into the merits of the War Department's contentions as to the beneficent influences of Army training, however, it may be stated without fear of successful contradiction that there are certain phases of Army experience which may be depended upon to act as a deterrent on possible criminal inclinations. Any prudent ex-service man with a knowledge of modern methods of penology would hesitate to enter upon a criminal career when he recalls that the War Department has a perfectly good record of his finger prints, nicely catalogued and indexed and accessible upon demand to the police authorities of any city in America.

In the old Ford Theater building in Washington, historic as the scene of the assassination of President Lincoln, the War Department has the finger-print records of more than 5,000,000 young Americans. This collection, which is believed to be the largest of its kind in the world, is largely the result of the draft. To be sure, the War Department had maintained an identity section since 1888 and had been making finger-print records of its officers and enlisted men since 1906, but by far the greater part of the enormous collection consists of the imprints of men who came into contact with the selective service machinery during the world war.

* * * *

THE value of this collection can scarcely be estimated. Hardly a day passes that the identity section is not called upon to lend its aid in untangling a mystery. In hundreds of cases it has proved the means of identifying unknown dead in shipwrecks, floods and railway accidents; in a number of instances the deductions of its experts have resulted in the capture and conviction of murderers and other criminals, and on still other occasions it has proved the means of establishing the innocence of persons who through the force of circumstantial evidence had become entangled in the mesh of suspcion.

The primary purpose of the identity section of the Army is to identfy unknown dead in time of war, and to keep undesirable ex-service men from re-enlisting under assumed names. It also has proved of great practical value in supplying soldiers with identification records necessary in securing discharges, and in addition it has proved a source of unexpected assistance to the police throughout the country in identifying criminals among discharged service men.

A recent example of the sort of inquiries that are coming in almost daily is that in connection with the Carl Wanderer murder case, which for months baffled the police of Chicago. An effort was being made to identify the "Ragged Stranger," the man alleged to have been paid by Lieut. Wanderer to stage a fake hold-up, and who was shot by Wanderer while carrying out the agreement. The Chicago police believed the "Ragged Stranger" to be an ex-soldier of Milwaukee, who was known to have served in the Army, either under his right name or that of Edward M—— of Texas. Knowing that the finger-print records of every man who served in the Army since the identification system was installed were on file with the War Department, they sent the imprints of the "Ragged Stranger's" fingers to Washington for comparison. It was found upon investigation that the finger prints were different from those on record. It was found that no less than six Edward M——s had served in the Army, and that two of them were from Texas, but the finger prints of the man slain in Chicago did not tally with those of any of the M——s who had served.

The peculiar significance of finger prints was well known to the ancients and persists in various superstitious and ceremonial practices, such as "kissing the book" in connection with the taking of oaths. In 1823 Purkenje, a professor of physiology, read before the University of Breslau a Latin thesis on finger impressions in which he gave nine standard types and suggested a system of classification. His labors, however, failed to attract the attention they merited. Francis Galton, the eminent sociologist, did perhaps the greatest service in bringing to the attention of the public the great value of finger prints as a means of identification.

* * * *

WHEN the immigration of the Chinese was causing so much excitement in America the suggestion was made, but not acted on, that a system of finger printing might be used for their registration. But no departure at any time previously made is comparable in importance with the systematized labors in this direction of Sir William Herschel of the British Indian civil service. Finding false personation prevalent in all the Indian courts, he determined to introduce the use of finger impressions in the district of Hooghly, in Bengal, of which he was then in executive charge. The success of the system was instantaneous, and it was soon introduced in practically all the departments of India.

Col. C. V. Henry, an Englishman, later became active in the extension and application of the system, and worked out what is probably the most satisfactory system of classification that has yet been discovered. The Henry system, slightly modified, is used by the War Department in Washington.

The most philosophical treatment of the subject, however, is probably that of Francis Galton, in addition to providing types and a nomenclature, suggesting a system of classification and examining the character and purpose of the riddges in their physiological aspect, Galton, who made use of much of the data collected by Sir William Herschel, has discussed the all-important question of persistence, and has proved that the details of ridges constituting the patterns of finger impressions persist throughout the whole period representing the life of man, those found on the fingers of the new-born infant being traceable on the fingers of the same person in old age, and apparently effaceable only when, after death, decomposition sets in.

Galton has brought together some evidence to indicate the transmissibility of patterns by descent, but finds that no sensible amount of corelation exists between the patterns or impressions and the bodily faculties or characteristics, or that these finger markings are distinctive of race or temperament.

Basing his conclusions upon examinations of many sets of prints taken at different times and covering the interval from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to early manhood, from early manhood to middle age and from middle to extreme old age, Galton has this to say as to the persistence of the same characteristics in finger prints throughout the life of the subject:

"As there is no sign except in one case of change during any of these four intervals, which together almost wholly cover the ordinary life of man, we are justified in inferring that between birth and death there is absolutely no change in, say, 699 out of 700 of the numerous characteristics of the markings of the fingers of the same person such as can be impressed by him wherever it is desirable to do so. Neither can there be any change after death up to the time when the skin perishes through decomposition. For example, the marks on the fingers of many Egyptian mummies and on the paws of stuffed monkeys still remain legible. Very good evidence and careful inquiry is thus seen to justify the popular idea of the persistence of finger markings. There appear to be no bodily characteristics other than deep scars and tattoo marks comparable in their persistence to those markings; at the same time they are out of all proportion more numerous than any other measurable features. The dimensions of the limbs and body alter in the course of growth and decay; the color, quantity and quality of the hair, the tint and quality of the skin, the number and set of the teeth, the expression of the features, the gestures, the handwriting, even the eye color changes after many years. There seems no persistence in the visible parts of the body except in those minute and hitherto disregarded ridges."

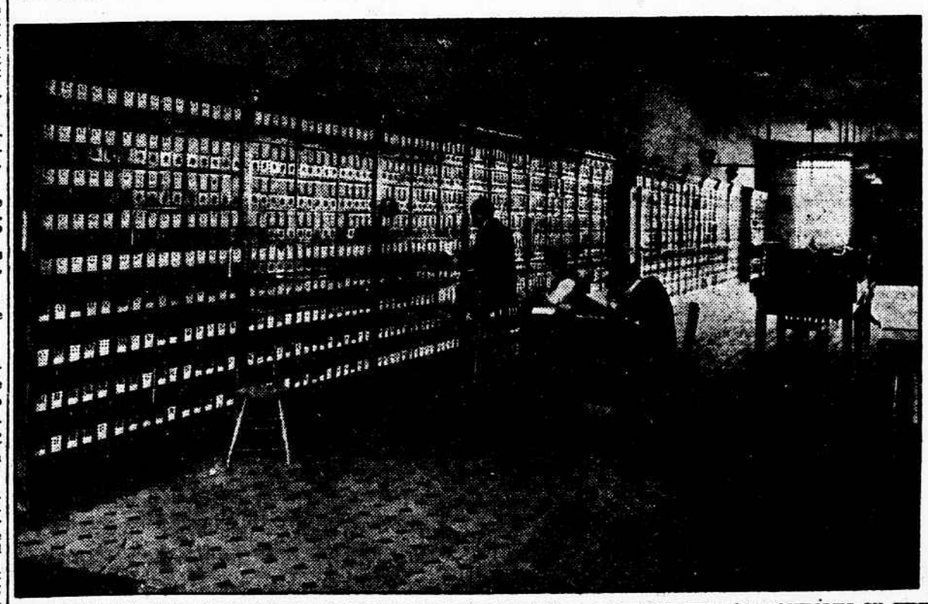
* * * *

SO useful has the identity section of the War Department proved that every now and then officials are compelled to squelch some ambitious and mercenary sheriff who tries to make the service pay him dividends. Ordinarily his method of operation is simple. He makes a collection of notices of rewards offered for the apprehension of criminals. Then he arrests every tramp who chances to pass through his bailiwick, takes finger print impressions of the unfortunate wayfarer and sends them to Washington on the chance of their proving to be those of some criminal with a price on his head. As the War Department has the finger-print records of practically every ablebodied young man in the United States, it often happens that it is able to tell the sheriff the name of the man in custody. Thereupon the sheriff checks over his list of rewards offered and if he finds the captive's name among them, he immediately notifies the persons offering the reward and then proceeds to collect it.

The War Department identity section is in charge of Walter S. Kaye, who enjoys the distinction of having organized the first identification bureau ever established in the American Army. Mr. Kaye, who is recognized both in the United States and abroad,

(Continued on Sixth Page.)

A FINGERPRINT HIGHLY MAGNIFIED. THIS PRINT FURNISHES SIXTY-FIVE SEPARATE AND DISTINCT POINTS OF COMPARISON. IF TWO PRINTS ARE ALIKE IN TEN PARTICULARS, THE CHANCES ARE 1,562,000 TO ONE THAT THEY WERE MADE BY THE SAME FINGER.



SCENE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S IDENTIFICATION BUREAU. EACH OF THE PIGEONHOLES IN THE CABINET ALONG THE WALL CONTAINS FROM FIFTEEN TO TWENTY RECORDS. EACH RECORD FURNISHES AN ABSOLUTE AND INDISPUTABLE PROOF OF THE IDENTITY OF THE MAN WHO MADE THE PRINT.